

Wikileaks: an example of ‘new’ and ‘old’ media collaboration. But does freedom of expression trump diplomatic confidentiality?

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The full impact of the revelations from the diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks will undoubtedly take days and weeks to unfold, and will certainly raise questions about what is in the public interest. In the meantime, [Charlie Beckett](#) looks at how both new and old media have worked together to bring these cables to light.



The Wikileaks revelations of how international diplomacy really works are a live experiment in how to inform the world through networked journalism, the combination of new media technologies and practices with traditional mainstream media and core journalistic principles.

But it also sets the ethical cat amongst the freedom of expression pigeons. Does this kind of publicity make it impossible for diplomats to have the confidentiality that makes negotiations possible?

This is how the [New York Times](#) reported the reaction of the US administration:

“The White House said the release of what it called “stolen cables” to several publications was a “reckless and dangerous action” and warned that some cables, if released in full, could disrupt American operations abroad and put the work and even lives of confidential sources of American diplomats at risk. The statement noted that reports often include “candid and often incomplete information” whose disclosure could “deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world.”

On the other hand, veteran British journalist [Simon Jenkins defended the right of the news media](#) to rile authority:

“The job of the media is not to protect power from embarrassment. If American spies are breaking United Nations rules by seeking the DNA biometrics of the UN director general, he is entitled to hear of it. British voters should know what Afghan leaders thought of British troops. American (and British) taxpayers might question, too, how most of the billions of dollars going in aid to Afghanistan simply exits the country at Kabul airport.”

And how different is Wikileaks anyway? It still needed the old -fashioned newspapers platforms and financing and the support of mainstream newsrooms to present this information in a way that is intelligible and has impact.

A longer [version of this post](#) originally appeared on Charlie Beckett’s blog on 29 November.